



Breakfast With the Chamber

Posted by [Pierluigi Oliverio](#) on Monday, April 13, 2009

...I did not actually eat breakfast with members of the Chamber of Commerce last week, but I met with them early in the morning—which is a challenge for me since I normally go to bed at 1am. The Chamber, as many of you know, is an interest group that advocates on behalf of small and large businesses. They invited me to attend their meeting for some Q-and-A.

The Chamber, like labor unions, the Democratic Party, the Republican Party, or the League of Conservation Voters, typically endorses candidates running for political office. Endorsements carry clout with some voters, but more importantly, endorsements come with monetary donations, plus independent expenditures for political mail to voters, and volunteers to walk door-to-door on your behalf. In my Council election, the Chamber endorsed my opponent and as a result, they did four independent expenditures on his behalf in addition to donating money to his campaign.

Elected officials are asked on a routine basis to speak with special interest groups so they may better understand how you feel about issues, thought process, values, explain past votes, etc.. As this is my "City Hall Diary," I wanted to let you know what we spoke about.

We chatted about San Jose Inside, which included many of my past blogs from the Rose Garden Park to the budget to pensions. They found much of what I have written and the comments posted to be refreshing and much more open-book than the norm.

Many of the members' perspectives, in the real world, comes from their private sector work. Therefore, there is a deep understanding about the risk of capital, the adage that "time is money," and that idea that there are no guarantees in life. Needless to say, their questions and perspectives were much like the constituents in my district who email me.

They want to know: How can someone get paid over \$275K in accumulated sick leave when they retire? How come the general fund

must cover the stock market loss for city pensions when private individuals have no one to ask for help for their own retirement? Why don't new employees not yet hired get 401K's?

I was asked about my opposition to converting industrial land to housing. As I have indicated before on this website, San Jose needs to keep land zoned industrial and preserve it for current or future job growth. My answer on this subject has remained the same whomever I speak to. We may very well convert an industrial parcel when my tenure in District 6 has passed or when the jobs catch up with housing growth. In the meantime, there is plenty of land zoned residential that will be built out after the recession.

I did ask the volunteer members of the Chamber that since they have questions about government fiscal policies, perhaps they attend city budget meetings if they can get out of work. I also expressed my goal to serve the residents of San Jose above interest groups, and stated my belief that decisions should be based on what is best for the San Jose as a whole for the long term.

If you are in business for yourself or work in private sector you may agree more often then not with the views advocated by the Chamber.

On another note: Last week the question came up as to whether the City can switch our retirement plans to the State Employees program called CalPERS. City pensions are in the City Charter XV, which would have to be maintained unless the Charter was changed by a citywide election. It is a complex move to transition from an independent plan to another system such as CalPERS, although other cities, such as Oakland, have done it.

There are two ways. One is to have new employees go into CalPERS, and current employees and retirees would stay in the existing plans. That is complicated because the liabilities would have to be paid with a declining number of members paying into the system—similar to Social Security. The other way is to move everyone over, which would still require voter approval (by you). Increased retirement benefits require voter approval in San Francisco, however, in San Jose no election is needed, since actions take place through the Council or binding arbitration.

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